

The Transparency Problem: The Missing Component to Church Men's Groups

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Healthy and growing church men's groups are built on honesty and transparency. However, do men feel safe being fully themselves there? Here is what actor Shia LaBeouf showed me about transparency and the church.



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The 36-year-old American actor Shia LaBeouf is a cultural lightning rod. He started as a child star on the Disney channel and grew up fast and loud under the blinding lights of Hollywood. Over the years, he has been in blockbuster movies, nominated for Oscars, in and out of rehab facilities, and eventually canceled over abuse charges. Why should we care?

Toward the end of 2022, LaBeouf returned to the public eye in a film where he portrays a young Padre Pio in a biopic on the Catholic saint. Last August, he did two video interviews that were published six days apart: [Bishop Barron Presents](#) and [Real Ones with John Bernthal](#). I watched both interviews and saw two vastly different presentations of the same person.

To clarify, it *was* the same person on both shows. A guy who recently got married and had a daughter. A guy who is owning and taking responsibility for his past actions. A guy who did the work to get clean and pursue healing. A guy who tried everything else before recently committing himself to Catholicism. It was the same guy on both podcasts. But the ways in which he presented himself—and perhaps how he was *invited* to present himself—were vastly different.

The biggest difference? The rawness with which he spoke. In the Catholic interview with Bishop Barron, LaBeouf shared earnestly about Padre Pio, prayer, and his ego. All good things.

But the conversation with John Bernthal felt more like an AA meeting than a chat in the church lobby. He poured his soul out. As he talked about his shame, his recovery, his family, and his faith journey, he used the kind of raw and expletive language that often draws the ire of many Christians.

I was struck by the gap—between the side of himself he felt comfortable showing to the church and the side he felt comfortable showing to a friend.

Who We Are In and Out of Church

Many of us struggle with this same gap; I know I do, along with most of my friends and peers.

We want God to transform the innermost parts of us, and we need the church body in this process. So why is it so hard to be fully ourselves in *the one place* where we should be able to be completely transparent? To be open and honest about our, as LaBeouf put it, “pleasure-seeking, selfish, self-centered, dishonest, inconsiderate, fearful, hurtful” selves? The parts of us desperate for Good News?

Have churches become synonymous with “safe for the little ears”? If so, no wonder some men are leaving. How big is the gap between who men are at church and who men are among our closest friends?

Transparency In Church Men’s Groups

I recently started exploring this question after joining an experimental men’s group at my church. Based on some of the work of Curt Thompson and Trapper Lukaart, the goal for our small group was to pierce through any veneer of our outward church presentations and go deeper in honest conversations as the body of Christ.

During our last gathering, I took the risk of sharing how I honestly felt about some things, as opposed to saying what I knew to be theologically accurate. Guess what happened? Everyone met me where I was.

They affirmed my struggles and led me to deeper questions and surprising answers. Several people teared up on my behalf and comforted me with genuine care. Everyone appreciated my openness.

At the end of the night, one person remarked, “Can we go ’til midnight? It feels like God is moving among us.”

This is what I want to experience in church men’s groups.

The Church Should Be the Place Where Men Feel Most Comfortable to Be Themselves

Can we, as the people of God, really meet each other where we are? Or do we have to play games, politick, and navigate church cliques just like any other human social group?

No one wants to feel like two people. We long to be truly known and earnestly loved. Although God is the only one who perfectly fulfills that

longing, He seeks to do so, in part, through His people. The people that are “of God” are the only ones who can provide us with a taste of His glory.

THE BIG IDEA: *We long to be truly known and earnestly loved. Although God is the only one who perfectly fulfills that longing, He seeks to do so, in part, through His people.*

If you’re a [Christian leader](#), make space for the men in your group or church to present themselves in their rawest form. They will be surprised by and grateful for the opportunity to [share their stories](#), their doubts, and their struggles. Only in those deep places can God stir our hearts, heal our wounds, and build us—His new creations—from the ground up.

Close the gap between who men are and who men are *at church*, and watch the men around you light up.

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